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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an overview of Aboriginal education in the state of Victoria, Australia, as a frame for the role of the Aboriginal Tertiary Support Unit (ATSU) at La Trobe University, Bendigo. At the elementary and secondary levels, Aboriginal advocacy and support are provided by the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association, which promotes Aboriginal community involvement and consultation; the Koori Education Coordination Unit, which monitors state implementation of the national Aboriginal education policy; and 56 Koori Educators, who assist schools in curriculum development. State initiatives in Aboriginal education have included a program of Aboriginal school speakers, a mentoring program in schools, an educational kit for teachers on Koori English, and the recent development of Aboriginal community schools. These "Koori Open Door Education" schools feature extensive community decision making, Aboriginal staff, culturally relevant practices, and curriculum linked to community and workplace concerns. Among aspects of Aboriginal culture that impact educational settings, the most important is communication, including verbal and nonverbal behaviors and behavior norms. Other noteworthy cultural traits include relationship with extended family, respect for adults, motivation, sharing, and aspects of self-esteem. A cultural checklist for teachers is presented. At La Trobe University, the ATSU provides academic and personal support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including counseling and social support, transitional programs for high school students, and housing. Current trends in Aboriginal tertiary participation and potential future delivery options are discussed. (SV)

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Tertiary Sucess for the Aboriginal Student

The Numerous Factors Impacting on the Dream

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TERTIARY SUCCESS FOR THE ABORIGINAL STUDENT: THE NUMEROUS FACTORS IMPACTING ON THE DREAM

For convenience terminology in this document I am going to refer to the Indigenous people of Australia as Aboriginal. Within communities throughout this country, use of this term is not always seen as appropriate with many communities actually preferring to use Aboriginal terms to describe who they are. This can either be a region, state-wide or specific tribal term of identification, the more generic terms are as follows. The state of Victoria, Tasmania, The Australian Capital Territory and southern parts of New South Wales usually use the term Koori. In Queensland and northern parts of New South Wales the term is Murri. In South Australia the term is Nunga, Western Australians use the terms Noongah and in the Northern Territory and Torres Strait Islands the terms is usually, spelt Yolnu. In this particular document I am going to use the term Aboriginal but at times it might reflect the fact that I am in the State of Victoria where I commonly use the term Koori as well and when I use the term Koori refers to Aboriginals in general, particularly those in the State of Victoria.

CURRENT VICTORIAN EDUCATION SYSTEMS - A BACKGROUND

In order to best explain the role of the Aboriginal Tertiary Support Unit at the La Trobe University in Bendigo one must look at the education system in our state of Victoria, Australia, and also the current structure of the systems in place. One can then look at where we operate within the current system and structures. The State of Victoria has an AECG (Aboriginal Education Consultative Group) which is in charge of Aboriginal education in the State of Victoria. This organisation is called the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, VAEAI.

The primary role of the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated is to address the imbalance that exists in educational outcomes of the Koori community located in the South Eastern region of Australia. VAEAI has a mandate from its members to operate at the local, state and national levels - its provence of critical concern being within Victoria and the Murray river regions of New South Wales. First established in 1976 as the Victorian Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, VAECG, initial efforts were spent in promoting greater involvement by the Koori community in the forums of the VAECG, most especially through the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups, LAECG.

Today the LAECGs remain the backbone of wide ranging consultative arrangements throughout the community in education and training matters. With all local Koori communities across the state having representation, the organisation was incorporated from the 1985 to become the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated. In respect to course and program development, VAEAI has as its priority, the provision of education and training initiatives which reinforce Koori communities cultural identity and those programs which convey to the wider community an awareness of Koori cultures and aspirations.

The key elements of VAEAI's consultative and administrative structure involve the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups or LAECGs. There are 29 constituent units of VAEAI across the State of Victoria representing each Aboriginal community in terms of educational issues. A formal community is established for each with membership open to all Kooris within the relevant locality. The activities of the LAECGs include the provision of advice on all education and training matters effecting students; monitoring trends in education with

direct impact on Koori students; advocacy role on behalf of Koori students and their families representation on committees and forums on educational training issues at the local and regional levels: representation at all VAEAI forums.

The Committee of Management is the critical policy making body of the organisation. It remains the primary authority over policy and program development. Only two matters fall outside the province of the committee - these being the election of VAEAI office bearers and any changes or amendments of the VAEAI constitution. In both cases these decisions are determined by ordinary members at the Annual General Meeting. Committee membership comprises President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, Twenty-nine LAECG representatives, six specialist representatives in the areas of early childhood, primary school, post primary school, TAFE, Adult Education and Tertiary Education.

Lastly, the VAEAI consists of eight regions across the State of Victoria, these regions being mapped on traditional family ties. The LAECGs in each of the regions appoint a representative to the Executive forum. In addition to the eight regional representatives the executive also comprises a President, Vice-President, Treasurer and Secretary. The Executive is the forum for the planning and development issues arising between meetings of the committee of management. It is responsible for the implementation of decisions made by the Committee of Management and for the Administration staff and on-going programs. The executive also provides a Forum for the planning and development of educational training programs at the regional level. The VAEAI Secretariat which is the working arm of the organisation, handles all policy and planning matters. The LAECG's also serve in also providing indispensable assistance on a local level.

There is also the Koori Education Co-ordination Unit - or KECU within the Directorate of School Education and this was established in 1989/90 to monitor the implementation of the National Aboriginal Education Policy, Victorian Strategic Plan. This unit consists of three or four positions which are essentially located at the Education Department in our state. Within the KEC there are 16 Koori Cross Sectoral Co-ordinators located throughout the state in areas with significant numbers of Kooris. The main roles of the Koori Cross-Sectoral Co-ordinator are to ensure that the specific needs as identified by the LAECG are recognised and reflected in the school curriculum and to co-ordinate the development of Koori education programs in conjunction with Koori education providers. The KCSC also assist the development of Koori parent participation in education decision making at school .and regions through liaison and provision of appropriate information. Other areas that the Koori Cross-Sectoral Co-ordinators are responsible for include the monitoring and evaluation of Koori educational programs as well as developing, disseminating and evaluating Koori curriculum resource material. Lastly, the promotion of understanding and awareness of Koori culture, and the issues which affect their educational needs, are critical aspects of their role.

While Koori Cross-Sectoral Co-ordinators obviously play a major role in the support system and network of the Koori education area, there are also fifty-six Koori Educators based in primary and secondary schools throughout the state to accommodate a large number of Koori students. The role of the Koori educators is to work closely and support Koori students at a local level in schools as well as liaise with DSE personnel, such as teachers, principals and parents. The Koori Educators also assist schools with their development of Koori educational programs, actively participating as a member of the Koori Cross-Sectoral team to encourage active parent and student participation.

Having discussed the role of the VAEAI in our state, it is important to discuss the other major role player in our education system, the Directorate of School Education, DSE. The DSE is basically the Education Department in our state and their impact on Victorian Aboriginal education is quite substantial. In 1989 a document was signed between the VAEAI and the DSE called "The Partnership Agreement", and that basically was an agreement which jointly outlined the nature of which both bodies would work closely together in partnership to achieve the necessary educational outcomes for Aboriginal people in our state. The DSE actually employs the sixteen Cross-Sectoral Co-ordinators in our state, Koori Education Co-ordination Unit staff and also employs the Koori Educators.

In terms of programs, one of the most successful initiatives was the "School Speakers Program". This involved the payment and organisation of Aboriginal people to come in as guest speakers in schools across the state, as well as higher education institutions. Aboriginal people were employed on a local level in order to express the views of the local Aboriginal people in terms of their history, culture, education and their aspirations. This initiative has been very successful and widely utilised by schools across the state. Another program that the DSE initiated through their partnership with VAEAI was the Mentor program. The Mentor program is a very successful program which involved the LAECG's identifying needs and deficiencies in their region, and then employing a person to act as a mentor to address those needs. In some regions it was found that there were lots of young Aboriginal children (9, 10, 11 year old) who were at risk and certainly needed some guidance. Many of these young children came from single parent families without consistent positive male role models available to them on a daily basis. So some communities used the mentor program to employ a male positive role model which could be based at a school and be in class rooms with children and actually help them with their daily school work, and just to be with them on excursions and be there when they are needed. This has been highly successful. Other communities who have different needs have utilised their mentor program and structured it in such a way to best address their particular needs. The DSE has also actively developed the area of language and literacy programs in conjunction with the Koori community. In fact, there is currently a very exciting initiative called "Deadly Eh Cuz" initiative which is an educational kit on Koori English, and explores the need for teachers to recognise that Koori English is an acceptable form of English language that Aboriginal children utilise, and that they should not be criticised for using their own language. This program has actually just been launched and will soon be utilised by teachers and educators in the State of Victoria. The "Deadly Eh Cuz" program is a program initiated by a very pro-active Aboriginal community in Shepparton. Shepparton is a small town of about 35-40,000 people and has a very high proportion of Aboriginal people including some very good educators and children. The Shepparton Aboriginal community is one of the leaders in our state in the provision of policy, programs and initiatives involving Aboriginal education. The "Deadly Eh Cuz" kit to teach people about Koori English has been a very exciting initiative that has come to fruition as a result of the partnership in education with the DSE, VAEAI and the local community in Shepparton.

KOORI OPEN DOOR EDUCATION SCHOOLS (KODE) : A NATIONAL PILOT PROJECT

The most significant educational initiative for the Aboriginal community that has resulted from the "Partnership in Education" between the DSE and VAEAI, is the development of the Koori Open Door Education Schools (KODE). The Aboriginal community have for twenty years, had a vision, the formation of Aboriginal community schools for their children. After 20 years of hard work and negotiation, their dreams became a reality in September 1996. The Aboriginal community through VAEAI put the proposal of Aboriginal community schools to the State

Minister for Education and it was approved and so the concept of the Aboriginal schools or the community schools was now a reality.

The concept came about because there was a need or perception by the Aboriginal community in our state that they wanted to improve the participation, retention and the outcomes of Aboriginal children in terms of their own education. Once the '94 approval was given by the Minister the aim was to have the schools operating by 1 February 1995, so there was an establishment of a task force, set up between the Aboriginal community and VAEAI and also the DSE. That task force had as a primary brief to formalise all the arrangements and to ensure that the project came to fruition by the set date. Certainly the time-line was tight but with everyone working towards the same goal, it was an achievable goal. The other role of the task force was the appointment of a KODE Project Officer to work on the day to day activities involved in the setting up of the KODE Schools. Furthermore, the agreement from the Victorian Government was that there would be in fact two community schools, one of which would be in the Melbourne metropolitan area and another one which would be in the rural area of our state. Obviously this meant choosing suitable sites based on several criteria to ensure that the eventual concept was a success. The community consultations involved the twenty-nine LAECGs and all the education communities were asked to express an interest and out of those came 5 full submissions. The key criteria that was used was the community support for the idea, not only from the Aboriginal community but from the wider community as well. There was an acceptance that for such a project to be successful, it needed the wider community support as well as the Aboriginal community support. The second critical criteria was 'need'. Each community was asked to express the need for the actual KODE schools coming to their region.They had to show justification on 'need', why they should have the school in their area. The third key criteria was looking at the 'current services and systems' in place in the region already. The KODE schools, to be successful, needed other support systems and services that were around in that town and in that area to ensure the success of the program overall. The fourth key criteria was the obvious one of the proposed student numbers. In order for the KODE schools to be successful, there had to be a reasonably large group of Aboriginal students to ensure that the program could best achieve the aims that the Aboriginal community wanted to achieve. There were obviously some points for consideration such as, should it be an annex of another school or should it be a separate stand-alone school? Should the school council be on its own or should it be a school council that will be attached to the existing school council? If you were part of an annex, for example, how would the staff at the Aboriginal school relate to the current staff already in place if it was an annex of a larger school? What structure or what model?

Whilst there was certainly a vision and a dream to have a 100% Aboriginalisation policy in terms of staffing, right from the ancillary staff to the teachers, principal and so on, it was also accepted that in the initial first instance this may not be an achievable or realistic target. The vision of a 100% was one shared by the Aboriginal community but it was generally accepted that for the initiative to be a success, then it needed to have the best people available in each area.

In terms of Aboriginal Education the concept of the KODE Schools has been a interesting and successful one for our state. A KODE School exists in the country town of Morwell, which is situated in a large coal-mining region and electricity area with a working-class community. The Morwell school was attached as an annex to the Kurnai Secondary College and basically set up on the site of the Kurnai Secondary College. The achievements at that school have been absolutely outstanding. The initial enrolments were about 85-90 students they are now around the 120 student mark and certainly. In terms of their outcomes and achievements and their

retention rates, they are achieving as good outcomes as any other schools in the state - Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal. The Metropolitan KODE school at Glenroy attached to the Box Forest Secondary College is slightly different because they are on a site of their own and they are about one mile away from the actual Senior Campus of the school, in effect they have a site of about five or six acres for a student population of about 120. It is an interesting situation in comparison, because they basically have their own facilities and grounds which could easily accommodate 400-500 students.

The initial concern for the KODE schools was that the Aboriginal community did not want them to be used as a remedial dumping ground. The community always wanted their own autonomy but also accepted that in order for it to be successful, the KODE schools needed a close association with an existing school and an existing infrastructure. The issues such as ownership in school curriculum, the ownership of decisions, management and other issues, were all relevant issues that needed to be addressed. The school had to have an Aboriginal focus and a culturally relevant environment but also ensure best practice models. It was to be a centre for excellence and state of the art technology because everybody wanted the project to succeed. Furthermore, the concept of the KODE Schools was in fact a five year national pilot project, and in terms of evaluation there have been other tertiary institutions put in to place to monitor and evaluate the progress of the whole project.

One of the key underlying ideas behind the setting up of the KODE Schools in our state was based on the kinship of the Aboriginal people and that's why the schools were designed from kindergarten to year 12. The strength of the kinship system was seen as a significant factor in the overall success and outcomes for all students.

In terms of current developments for the KODE schools, student numbers have increased and the attendance rates are increasing. In fact some of the attendance rates at one of the schools are as good as any other attendance rates in the region if not better in terms of students actually turning up to school and attending and participating. The community involvement in decision making has been excellent and therefore the community feels that they own the decisions, a critical factor in their success. There has also been an increase in parent participation and involvement. The fact is that Aboriginal people have never really had such an opportunity to be involved in every facet and aspect of their children's education, and such an opportunity is one that they are certainly enjoying. The retention rates are also better and improving.

In terms of staffing - one of the schools actually has, as a school principal, a non-Aboriginal person and one has an Aboriginal person. In terms of gender, there is a woman in charge of the KODE School in Morwell (country area) who had a considerable background as a principal in mainstream schools before her appointment at the KODE Morwell School. The School is achieving significant outcomes and it has been an enormous success. The other school has a male Aboriginal principal who also has achieved significant success in his short time there.

Although both KODE schools have only been operating for 18 months, there aren't any real problems at this stage. One significant factor that has come out of this entire process is the recognition that for a long time the Aboriginal community and the parents have never actually been involved to this extent in every facet of decision making at a school. Self empowerment has also brought with it some interesting ramifications in terms of control and power. Overall it has been an interesting concept and one of the best initiatives that the VAEAI and the Directorate of School Education have achieved in our state. Furthermore the success of the

KODE project will obviously have significant impact on education across our state and certainly if it achieves its main objectives. of ensuring more Koori students complete their VCE or graduate in our state, it will significantly impact on our ATSU at La Trobe University, Bendigo. Obviously with more students completing their Year 12 successfully, more will take up tertiary studies.

The KODE success is largely due to the fact that the f actors that impact on schooling outcomes for Koori students were addressed by the original proposal. Basically the KODE schools were set up to meet the needs of Koori students and the community through Koori inclusive curriculum, and to maximise Koori participation in all aspects of schooling. Therefore, the idea was that it should ensure cultural maintenance for Koori students while addressing such important issues as Aboriginal pedagogy support for students and sensitivity of the teachers. The campus council representatives of the Koori community have direct responsibility for decision making in relation to curriculum policy, staffing, resource allocation between campuses. The KODEs deliver education services to Koori communities by building on culturally relevant learning models and practices that develop a supportive and culturally relevant learning environment from the kindergarten to Year 12. Another important aspect or another aim has been to integrate the content and the processes of educational provision to meet the needs of the Koori communities. This was achieved by linking community and workplace issues with school curriculum based activities. Another aim was to facilitate self determination within Koori communities by providing the opportunities for Koori community members, parents and students to decide on staff selection, content, delivery and evaluation of educational provision. That basically summarises the main objectives of the KODE issue. Obviously, one of the reasons for their success was that by having a partnership between VAEAI and the DSE, it would improve educational outcomes through better co-ordination of services.

THE NATIONAL ABORIGINAL EDUCATION POLICY (A.E.P.) AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Another area that has a significant impact on Aboriginal education in our state and on a national basis is the AEP, which is the Aboriginal Education Policy. In fact, the AEP outlines the funding arrangements for all Aboriginal education programs and initiatives. The policy operates on a triennial (three year) planning and funding basis. The AEP began in January 1990 for a three year period, with the next period from 1993 to 1995 comprising the second triennium. The AEP has four main educational aims, these are to firstly: ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are involved with decision making. Secondly, to provide equity of access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to services; Thirdly, to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation rates to those of all Australians and fourthly, to achieve equitably and appropriate outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Although they are the four main educational aims of the AEP there are actually twenty-one goals, and obviously some of these pertain to my area of higher education. All Australian government and relevant non-government Educational providers have agreed to implement this policy through co-operative arrangements. These cover educational planning, funding, monitoring and reporting of progress towards the achievement of policy's twenty-one goals.

Some of the AEP goals cover all areas of education and schooling. The are four main objectives of the AEP and the first one being the involvement of Aboriginal people in educational decision making. The second main objective of the AEP addresses equality of access to educational services and the third main objective is equity of education participation, and the last objective is the area of equitable and appropriate educational outcomes.

THE CONCEPT OF EDUCATION

It is important to clarify that for most Aboriginal people, education is a concept which is a life to death process. It is the holistic approach and that is why it begins from birth, continues on through the early childhood development years, primary schooling and we continue to learn until the concept of death. For Koori people education is a holistic issue and it is concerned with the wellbeing of the whole person, spiritually, mentally and physically. Education of the individual, affects the education and health of the community, and that of the community reflects on the individual. Education generally covers all areas including, family, family relationships, purpose I life, equal opportunity, equal access to services, options and choices in life and so on.

CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS ON EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

In order to discuss education one must have an understanding and awareness of some important cultural facts which are critical and will impact on the delivery of the kinds of services and support systems we are constantly involved in at the Aboriginal Tertiary Support Unit at La Trobe University, Bendigo.

In terms of Aboriginal Culture, there are some very basic things that are pertinent to Aboriginal people nationally. Although they differ slightly from communities and states, they are generally are very much an accepted part of the culture. The important thing to understand is that you must be aware of these differences in the culture in order to be successful in any sort of educational terms. The Aboriginal Tertiary Support Unit at La Trobe University, Bendigo is certainly spending a considerable amount of time at the moment planning cross cultural training but I think the important thing to understand there is that cross cultural training is about raising awareness rather than teaching culture. In broad terms an awareness package explains the history of Aboriginal culture and heritage and works through the issues of cultural diversity, correct protocols, program and service delivery to Aboriginal communities and involves participating in role reversal exercises. In the past the problem has been that there has been very little attention paid in the content of Education Programs to the relevance of cultural, traditional, political and socio-economic factors of Aboriginal history and Aboriginal society to Aboriginal education and well-being. Correlations do exist between these factors and must be taken into account if there is to be a marked improvement in Aboriginal education. The fundamental target should be to achieve a parity of educational status between the indigenous and non-indigenous populations and State governments and federal governments will have to play a pivotal role in the development of that sort of proposal in achieving cross-sectoral co-operation.

In terms of education, the key factor is language. Language can be an obstacle and when seeking information, people are often frustrated because Aboriginal people appear slow or reluctant to answer. A number of factors can be adversely affecting this situation. For a start it is not uncommon for Aboriginal people to relate situations where professionals use jargon or long words and talk too fast, an immediate barrier to understanding. This being the case, Aboriginal people will just sit there, mute and agree with proceedings regardless of their true feelings. Another can be that they consider a question being asked as inappropriate as a relationship with the enquirer is only casual.

Tone of voice is another one and it is equally important. It is not unusual for a brusque, business-like professional approach to be interpreted as rude, thus reinforcing Aboriginal stereotypes that non-Aboriginal people are critical of them. So, it is the issue of society's perception of, and its the attitude towards power. Members of majority groups, frequently possess power over minorities by virtue of their dominant social culture, the profession to which

they belong, the history of majority/minority reaction interaction. Individuals must come to terms with this reality and guard against domination and reinforced independencies, and consequently crippling minority initiatives. A society's perception is also critical in terms of their attitudes towards change. We currently live in Australia in a majority culture which is oriented towards rapid change in values, development, progress and individual initiatives. Many cultural groups perceive change differently, are less prepared to accept change on the majority's terms and have established different methods of coping with it. As you can see there is a whole history of attitudes and change and the majority/minority relationships that are going to affect any sort of educational outcomes and achievements. In terms of culture, I think it important that we put the effects of culture shock on us into perspective. Just as we experience some measure of discomfort in having to adjust to different traditions, expectations and beliefs, so Aboriginal people, when they interact with members of the dominant society, experience discomfort in trying to adjust to what they perceive as that society's expectations and beliefs. This can create tension in ordinary daily settings.

The key factor in relation to culture shock is communication. A different system of communication, both verbal and non-verbal, can be a primary stressor in the educational setting. Although the majority of Aboriginal people speak English, tonal differences, colloquialisms, and other factors serve to obscure meaning which can block their access to important cues for responding appropriately. If you have little, or no previous contact with Aboriginal people, you are likely to have difficulty communicating even if you are both patient and sympathetic. I mean the language and jargon of education and management and education and people which may exclude the student or the community person and create anxieties based on ignorance, is in fact a convenient short-hand for the educational professional with benefits which leads to greater efficiency and clarity. Nevertheless, when individuals do not share the same knowledge, those in the know have power over those who do not and they thus consciously or unconsciously reinforce the status differential between themselves, students and the community.

I think there are three aspects of interpersonal communications. These include non-verbal communications, rules and conventions, and acceptably behaviour-etiquette. In terms of non-verbal communication, unspoken messages given and received in Aboriginal cultures, probably have the greatest impact on communication and the potential rapport between yourself and the Aboriginal community. Silence also forms an important part of Aboriginal communication patterns. People will be quite happy to sit, there may be an occasional comment, but there is no obligation to keep conversation flow. For those used to interactions which have a particular focus, whether this be social or professional, tolerance of silence, acceptance of and relaxation of non-communication, can at times prove difficult and stressful. The reverse is also true. That is, at times people will be sitting and participating in four or five discussions at the one time, switching from one to the other with confusing rapidity and change. The only way to deal with the situation is to sit back and listen and to relax with silences and to learn to tune in to local speech patterns and idioms.

In the area of rules and conventions the imbalance of power which always exists between groups, strongly influences trust and interpersonal interactions. Power can be used subconsciously and at times deliberately, by professionals to hide their insecurity about being socially unskilled in an Aboriginal environment. Such an inadequacy may cause you discomfort but more importantly it can be detrimental to negotiations and future associations. Constructive interaction can only be achieved if there is mutual respect and understanding - so take a step back, create space to learn rather than stepping forward on the assumption that you know.

Aboriginal people are not fond of experts who assume that they know everything, who talk too much about their assumed knowledge and generally big-note themselves.

The last one that is very important is the concept of death. Deaths in the Aboriginal community impact upon many due to the all too often young ages of victims, the insular nature of the community and kinship ties which exist between many of the families. At times personal family and community crisis such as death, kinship affiliations, commitment to family and the people's concept of caring and support comes to the forefront, regardless of a persons professional, financial and social obligations or responsibilities. Many Aboriginal people when seriously ill will wish to go home, as that is where they want to die, in their country where they belong. Further, when an individual is ill, in particular when he or she is seriously ill, everyone, not only close relatives, will visit to pay their respects.

SPECIFIC CULTURAL TRAITS

Before you discuss Aboriginal education you need to be fully aware of some of the issues involved in Aboriginal culture which have a significant impact on the success or failure as you as an educator, whether it be at the primary level, (elementary level), the high school level,(secondary school level) or at the College or Higher Education level.

The first area to be aware of is the area of 'extended family'

A) The loyalty to family this can involve :

- defending relatives, this could mean any other Aboriginal students
- attending funerals, and this is a cultural expectation of Aboriginal people
- minding family members, young or old
- family crisis and community commitments may outweigh the children's educational needs
- adopting adult roles and assuming adult responsibilities
- forming friendship groups within Aboriginal and family groups, exclusive of other people

B) Respect for Adults

- Looking after older people
- Calling adults, especially old people, Aunty or Uncle (even when they are not related).
- Acknowledging and giving respect and allegiance to a wide range of kin and community members

Another area that is important is the relationships outside the family and this is broken up into three sections.

A) Is person motivated rather than task motivated

- tasks are undertaken in a co-operative way
- students will not perform a task if there is

seemingly no sense in it

- students will perform a task, motivated by the person who suggests it rather than being motivated by respect for authority or by the nature of the task

B) Sharing

- common ownership of clothing and school equipment
- tasks undertaken on a co-operative basis
- tasks shared with relatives

C) Self Esteem

- low self-esteem outside family and Aboriginal community
- Very strong in the family - children know who they are and where they belong and what their responsibilities are

The other important point in terms of cultural differences is eye contact. Eye contact is one feature.that has been commented on as being different in its use. For Aboriginal people, it is discourteous to maintain constant eye contact or even to give eye contact in specific communicative context. In situations when an Aboriginal child is being reprimanded it is highly unlikely that eye-contact will remain. For example, also when an elder is speaking, other Koori people are liable to slightly hang their heads as a show of respect. In another area, tone of voice is important, because Aboriginal people respond when addressed in a quite tone of voice.

Verbal - the word no, does not exist in the Aboriginal language. So hence you are likely to receive a Yes or a Maybe to most questions. That does not necessarily mean that agreement or acceptance is being given. In the Aboriginal culture there is value placed on brevity. You can expect short answers to questions, lack of dialogue does not mean passive aggressiveness or non-co-operation or stupidity.

The Issue of Request - when you want an Aboriginal person to do something, request rather than instruct. Orders are associated with past experiences of authority, police, prisons and welfare intervention. So you would be a lot more successful with an Aboriginal student if you request something rather than instruct them to do something.

The Issue of Co-operation - to engage Aboriginal People's co-operation you ask rather than tell.

Individual Attention - Drawing attention to an Aboriginal in a group can cause embarrassment or shame which in turn reduces the likelihood of co-operation. Try to deal with the individual away from the group.

There are a few main things that teachers can do to help Aboriginal children and students learn more effectively. Firstly :

recognise that Aboriginal people have an Aboriginal identity and an Aboriginal culture with characteristics not shared by other cultures or groups in the community. It is a unique contemporary culture

recognise each Aboriginal student as an individual

- recognise that Aboriginal students are individuals within a group

- recognise that some traditional concepts, particularly kinship, still maintain a very strong influence on contemporary culture

- recognise that 200 years of oppression by the dominant white society determines the attitudes and reactions of Aboriginals today

- recognise that economic domination by the white community has resulted in hardships for most Aboriginal people in areas of health, housing, employment and education

- recognise that Aboriginal children from other parts of Australia also have different cultures

- recognise that Victorian Aborigines have a contemporary culture with only limited access to their Victorian traditional culture

Basically, teacher expectations are critical to successful learning taking place, as they are with any other student.

You have to believe in the children's ability to achieve

You must transmit this belief to the children

You must be sincere and sensitive. How you respond initially to a Koori student will determine the basis of your long-term relationship

The thing I would like to stress here is that I think Aboriginal children, as my personal experience attest to, better than any other children that I have been involved with as a teacher or educator, can really have a sixth sense of being able to read body-language. Often I hear the term or you hear teachers say "That student just doesn't like me, he won't work for me, he just won't co-operate." I like to turn that around and ask the question "Maybe your body language is telling your student that you don't like them?"

In terms of any teacher student success another key factor is, like success of any student, there has to be a very good teacher parent interaction and participation by parents in their parents schooling. You may find in that area, that many Aboriginal parents are shy and reluctant to talk to teachers and this may be due to their own experiences and their own poor experiences in the schooling system when they were children. Firstly:

- parents may take a long while to feel confident about the relationship because of their own school experiences, past dealings with authorities in institutions and anxiety about the child's achievement. So be prepared to wait.

- because of the emphasis on personal relationships, the response to your contact with the parent or other significant adult can be much greater than with a non-Aboriginal family.

- when you form a mutually supportive relationship with a parent, cultural differences would be perceived with sensitivity and bond will be established.

- lastly start the relationship early in the schooling year - so that it develops positively throughout the year.

I think that in terms of your attitudes to Aboriginal students, or the teacher's attitude to Aboriginal students, there is a cultural checklist which I have seen which I have used in the past with some success.

These are the questions on the cultural checklist and I think they would apply to most Indigenous people and to Indigenous kids attending non-Indigenous institutions with a majority of non-Indigenous students and so on.

1. Do I accept that Aboriginal people are different to Australian people / non-Aboriginal people and why?

2. What do I feel or believe about Aboriginal people.

Obviously this is a check-list, I mean this check list is designed for the teachers and the educators dealing with Aboriginal students.

3. Do I consciously feel that I treat Aboriginal people differently from non-Aboriginal people and why?

4. Are there some behaviours that I do not understand or consider unusual and why?

5. Do I have empathy for Aboriginal people and interest in their culture and why?

6. Am I prepared to negotiate with the Aboriginal person and/or community.

7. How do I match my expectation of success with those of the Aboriginal person.

THE BENDIGO REGION - A TRIBAL BACKGROUND

In order to discuss the role of the Aboriginal Tertiary Support Unit, La Trobe University, it is important to provide a little background on local Aboriginal clan. The local Aboriginal clan in the area surrounding Bendigo is known as the Dja Dja Wurrung clan. In terms of their history, it is a clan that surrounds Bendigo and regions around Korong and surrounding areas. The basic land owning unit of the Dja Dja Wurrung society was a clan, a named localised patrilineal descent group whose members had an historical, linguistic, religious and genealogical identity. The clan was associated with what we can call an 'estate', defined as a traditionally recognised locus, that is, its 'country, home, ground or dreaming place'. An estate was more or less a continuous stretch of country in which a special site, or constellation of sites, was located. The clan was the land-owning, land-renewing, land-sustaining unit of Aboriginal society.

The Dja Dja Wrung people also had their own language but it was divided into several tribes or

several clans and sometimes as many as ten or twelve existed within the Dja Dja Wurrung, each of which has a distinctive appellation. Basically each of these tribes or clans had its own district or country, its extent at least, and in some instances, its district boundaries being well known to the neighbouring tribes or clans. This subdivision of the territory even went further than that. Each family had its own locality and to this day the older men and the elders can clearly point out the land which their fathers left them, which they once called their own.

ROLE OF THE ABORIGINAL TERTIARY SUPPORT UNIT - LA TROBE UNIVERSITY, BENDIGO

In discussing the Aboriginal Tertiary Support Unit and explaining the current services and systems we have in place, one must first explain the background of our ATSU Unit. Then we can explain the direction it has now taken to achieve the basic objectives for higher education in our state and the systems within which we work. The Aboriginal Tertiary Support Unit a La Trobe University, Bendigo was established in 1983 to provide academic and personal support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are enrolled in any undergraduate or postgraduate course at La Trobe University, Bendigo. The types of support areas ATSU caters for are careers counselling, financial advice, tutorials, course requirements and entry, computer facilities and also family and personal support. Basically our role is to make the students' University experience a positive and fulfilling one by providing a culturally relevant learning environment which will enhance their study and educational outcomes. The ATSU also encourages improved participation rates in higher education for Koori students and seeks to have significant impact and influence in encouraging positive attitudes in the University and the wider community. The ATSU works very closely with relevant groups within the University, local Koori groups and the wider community to achieve its aims. People sometimes don't appreciate that Aboriginal students coming to our institution face a very daunting task when you consider there are some five and a half to six thousand students at our campus, and so most times Aboriginal students find it a very compelling and daunting experience just to enrol and turn up to do their course. Especially when one considers that the majority of those students come from very remote areas and remote communities from other areas of the state, often having to relocate just to do their tertiary education in Bendigo. One must appreciate and understand that for these students to be successful and to achieve their aims and their outcomes, they have got to be given all the necessary support. Pastoral support, welfare support and tutorial and educational assistance must be provided to ensure that they attend and maintain their focus, and are happy in their environment allowing them to achieve their potential goals.

One must understand that the needs of the Aboriginal student are different, in particular in Higher Education, where they are going to be markedly outnumbered, some probably 100 to 1 on occasion, in terms of being an Aboriginal student in a non-Aboriginal population. Basically, anything happening to an Aboriginal student is going to have a significant impact merely because their needs, and the stresses on those students. That is, if a non-Aboriginal student is one of five or six thousand students who is currently not coping or is having difficulty with the course or with their lecturer or some assignment, then the impact of that issue is not as significant on that student because there are going to be several thousand other non-Aboriginal students that that person can share their situation with, and share their stresses and discussion with. Whereas the Aboriginal student in the same situation maybe at times one of only thirty students in the lecture room or a tutorial where there are no other Aboriginal students for support. There may be sixty or 100 Aboriginal students right across the University in some cases, and that again presents the problem of being very much a minority group and not being able to assist and support each other, especially when one remembers the strong kinship ties that Aboriginal people are used to. To

be taken away from that without their family support at the University and be living away from home in their communities is a problem we have to constantly deal with. Individual needs are critical and the Aboriginal Tertiary Support Unit has to address and assist those students with their needs, and make sure that their needs are met to ensure that they enjoy their educational experience. We constantly stress at the University that Aboriginal people are not all the same. It is not ok to simply say that student is Aboriginal. They very much have different cultures depending on what community they are from, what area of the country they are from and what State or Territory they are from and those differences can be significant. So again, whilst we must be aware of their cultural differences we must also understand the complexities that exist within those cultural differences.

One of the things that we are currently doing is that we are trying to increase the awareness of the ATSU at La Trobe University and to make students more comfortable with the thought of entering a higher education institution by getting the students at a younger age. One of the programs that we are currently piloting is a program called the Transition University Program where the University will be aiming to focus on 11th and 12th year students who are in our main catchment areas in the Northern regions of our state, and central regions of our state. The main aim of the program will be to provide a greater awareness of the University, its roles, its functions, its systems and structures. Students who participate in the program will have the opportunity of meeting other Aboriginal students currently enrolled at La Trobe University, Bendigo and they will be able to share their experiences about University life with them. While in Bendigo the participants also meet local Koori elders and local community leaders and members of the local Aboriginal Co-operative which is the Dja Dja Wrung, in order to gain a more balanced view of life in Bendigo. The participants will meet key people at our University here so that they can gain some firsthand experience of what actually happens at a University and hopefully this will alleviate some of the myths, the fears and anxieties that many Aboriginal students feel about the prospect of University or Tertiary life. Furthermore, the opportunity to mix with and have access to positive role models will hopefully encourage the students to consider tertiary education at our University as a viable and suitable option in the future. This program will be conducted in stages, remembering that our academic year begins in March and ends at about November. Stage One is bringing students in small groups of twenty or thirty from various areas or communities around the state on daily visits where the students actually visit the University in small groups together with their friends and families. The University and the Aboriginal Tertiary Support Unit would look after them for the day, taking them around town, showing them the support facilities available, and the community people. Students would attend some guest lectures and presentations by lecturers under normal circumstances, so they can get a feel for what a lecture is. On those daily visits we would hope that some relationships and foundations are set in place for us to build up a good rapport with the student and let them return back to the community until they finish their year twelve education and then consider us again as a viable option to do their further study.

Stage Two of the Transition University Program will be conducted at the end of November when most of the University has actually shut down after exams. This involves bringing all those students that participated in Stage One back into the University for a 4-5 day period, and participating in a structured program of activities. Basically Stage Three would be very similar to Stage Two but they would then be mixing with other students, not only Aboriginal students. Hopefully the positive gains and barriers we have overcome in Stage One and Two, would allow them to feel comfortable about participating in Stage Three. Stage Four is enrolling in our University to start the following year. Another aspect of the TUP is those students that were in

Year 11, who have another year of schooling to go before they graduate, would be brought back early in the following year to allow them to attend evaluation workshops so that we can monitor and co-ordinate the future running of the program. This program will hopefully be running for the first time this year and we are quite confident it will create some significant interest, which will be reflected in the increase in enrolments for Aboriginal students.

Whilst Bendigo is a good sized town of approximately 100,000 people, there are basic areas which we have found difficulty with in terms of supporting Aboriginal students in our community. Bendigo does not have a large number of Aboriginal people and therefore it means that we do not have any suitable culturally appropriate and relevant public housing and accommodation which caters for Aboriginal students. In particular for those that are moving away from their communities and move to our town. Whilst many are quite keen to enrol inn our University courses, we often find one of the most daunting hurdles we have to overcome is to provide adequate and culturally relevant housing for those students to live in. An Aboriginal Hostel system exists in most regional town centres and in capital cities which is run by an Aboriginal community organisation and caters for similar situations, is low cost housing in a group situation. These hostels also take into account the Aboriginal culture, and the need for those people to be living together and to be supported by others around them. So one of the real priorities for our Unit at the moment is the provision of such housing for prospective future students. Whilst a main priority would be an Aboriginal hostel, we will consider all other options.

We are currently developing some initiatives to employ more Aboriginal people in our Unit to try and get out into the community in the area of community support and community liaison. They can be out there dealing with the sorts of daily issues that confront our Aboriginal students in terms of their lectures and their assignments and their well-being on a personal and private basis as well.

An Aboriginal Tertiary Support Unit in an Institution such as our University here is constantly involved on a daily basis in the policy direction, curriculum development, and content of any curriculum material that is taught at the University. We are constantly involved in the consultation process with the various Faculties within the University that have to deal with Aboriginal issues, and our role is to oversee this to ensure that an Aboriginal perspective is included in any teachers or any documents and lectures that involve or pertain to Aboriginal people.

CURRENT TRENDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

Finally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander University students are mostly enrolled at present in two fields of study, basically in the arts and in the humanities or in the social sciences and education fields. The third major field of study for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander University students is business administration and economics. In terms of levels, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in degree and higher degree courses, has increased in recent years, correspondingly the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander University students enrolled in diploma and certificate award courses has actually decreased over the years. The number of degrees conferred on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander University students has actually increased in recent years and a growing number of students are completing higher degrees. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander University students overall completion rates are however, still below the completion rates of other Australian University students. The last census done in 1991 by the Australian Government

shows that there are increases in the overall participation of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in all sectors of education. Schooling, TAFE and the Higher Education University area. However, the sixteen to twenty-four year old education participation rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is about half that of other Australians as it was in 1996. The increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation is 5.4%, not as great as that for other Australians, which is in fact. 9.2%. In the sixteen-twenty-four year old age group there are major differences in participation by urban and rural locations as well, which are quite interesting for us given the location of the student population that we cater for. For example, between 1986 and 1991 participation rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait people living in urban areas improved by 7% - from 17.8 to 24.8. In contrast, the rural participation only improved by a mere 2.2% from 11.2 from 13.4. The main gain in participation was in the capital cities, up by 9%, while the area of least improvement was in fact in the rural localities where the participation rate increased by merely .5%. Obviously some of the factors discussed earlier in terms of Aboriginal cultural needs, and the factors that may affect the enrolment of students in higher education, and their subsequent success, could be relevant in these statistics.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

Overall, the issue of Aboriginal education in this country is one that affects and has an impact on many people in many areas, and it is that holistic approach to education that I think is important. In terms of our Aboriginal Tertiary Support Unit, our strategy over the next few years is to ensure the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Higher Education increases. We are also trying to improve the rate of mature age students, and possibly change the way we deliver our programs through flexible service delivery into the communities, all this will be a major change in direction. This could actually improve the enrolments by taking the education back to the communities rather than the students having to attend our University.

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

In rural Victoria, in particular, where we currently have our University and Bendigo as a campus, there is a real desire inn our communities to be involved in University education but there is a recognition that courses offered would be limited until viability factors become evident and long term. So certainly, the flexible service delivery and the notion of having tertiary education in our communities is one that we as a University and other Universities and Higher Education Institutions must consider over the next five to ten years. We have to recognise that second-chance students are hungry for education and are able to be role-models in their institutions. There are numerous opportunities to both enrol mature age students and to employ elders and leaders as catalysts for curriculum development student support programs. The idea of Koori spiritual leaders being fundamental to the average Koori students' success must not be overlooked or under-estimated. Part of the problem is that Koori people are not targeted as preferred mainstream students by Universities, consequently well established options like distance education, part-time study, open-learning programs, undertaking similar subject studies, including the use of interactive multi-media technology, are not principle strategies used by Victorian Universities to deliver various types and levels of programs to Victorian Aboriginal people.

SUMMARY

In the years to come it will be important that Universities and the mainstream education sector in this country, fully recognise the Koori people who are equivalent home culture professors, such as elders. Elders are imminent scholars who merely lack a whiteman's

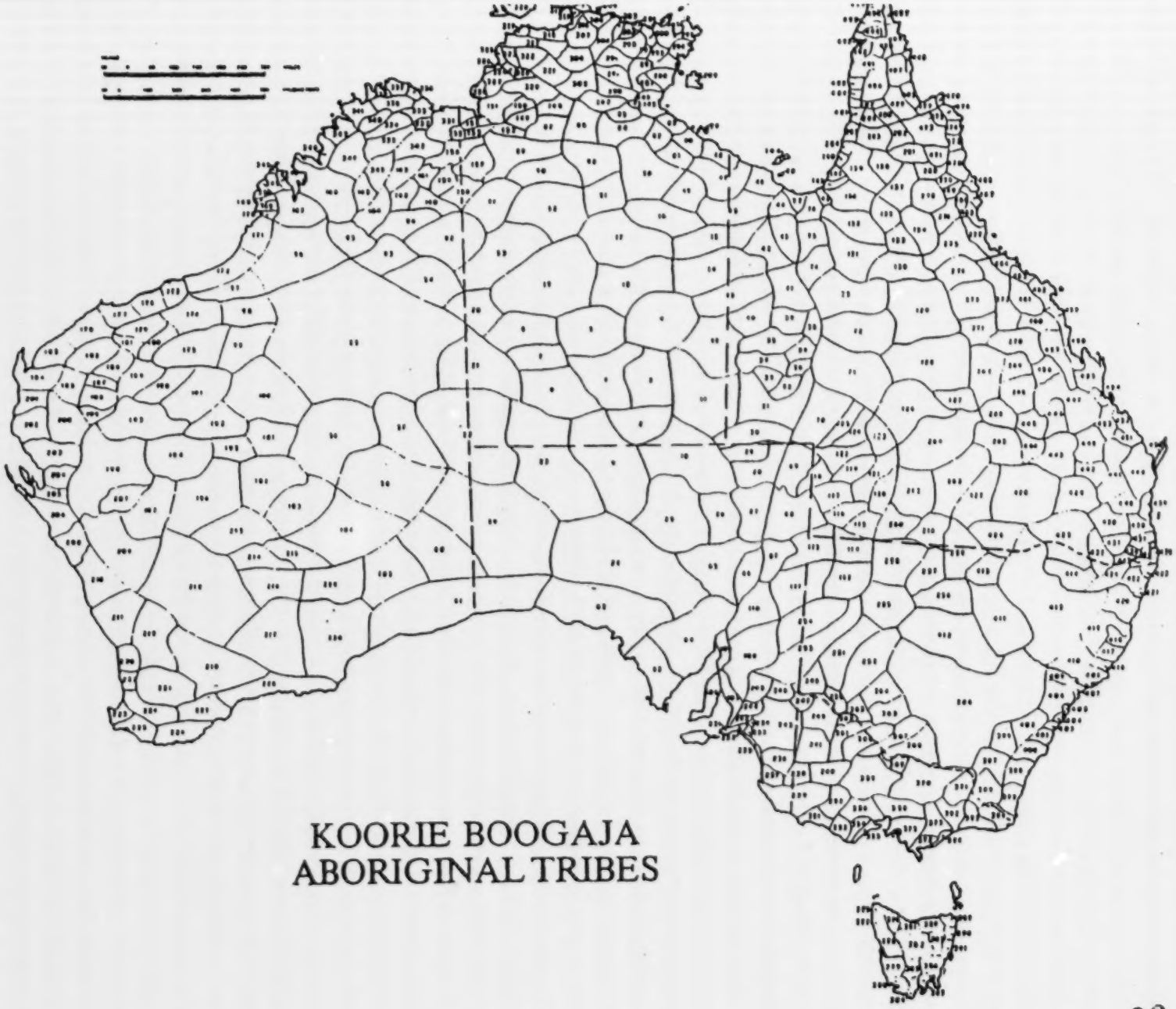
qualification and I think that each time the system rejects such people and refused to acknowledge them in the context of academic equality, the Koori students and Koori staff also suffer rejection. One of my favourite terms that I constantly use is in terms of the Koori elders is that "Every time that an elder dies, a library burns". There has to be a significant effort from not only the Aboriginal community, but the wider community in our state, to really work very hard over the next five to ten years, if it isn't too late already, to ensure that there are significant oral histories taken from Aboriginal elders across our State. There is a real danger that all that knowledge could be lost and this could have significant impact on the education system at every level. Certainly, we as a University are trying very strongly at the moment to involve the elders in the community in many of our teachings and we are currently developing several programs where the elders and community people are actually delivering many of the lectures in their own community and also at the University. This still raises some problems, with many elders and many community people, still not having confidence in educational institutions as a result of their own experiences over the years. There still exists a fear of the institutions dealing with the cultural and intellectual property of the elders, some elders generally believing that whilst Institutions seem willing to attempt to implement Koori views or perspectives, they will only respond in context of their long held and entrenched academic and pedagogical rules. Therefore, the role of the Aboriginal Tertiary Support Unit is an interesting one and a diverse one having to deal with many interesting barriers before successful outcomes are achieved.

Overall, there are several things that we at La Trobe University in the ATSU are trying to address in terms of Aboriginal education and the direction in which we are heading. Firstly, we have set up an Aboriginal Education Committee with appropriate representation from each of our campuses to determine the issues which would benefit from the overall University perspective, and that particular committee continues the practice of maintaining adequate Aboriginal representation. This committee advises on all matters pertaining to the issues of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education on each campus. We have also decided to, as a Unit, adopt a pro-active culturally relevant, public relations push to lift our profile, aimed at trying to increase our awareness and certainly lead to a higher student intake in the coming years. We will continue to pursue our current policy emphasis on equity and participation, and build on our present successful policies that we have put into place.

In summary, it is important to say that participation rates of indigenous people in education and training is particularly low in comparison to Australian norms. It is essential that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have the opportunity to take part in all levels of education in a way that is relevant, enjoyable and useful. Social justice principals demand that Indigenous people feel that education and training providers value their involvement, and the programs that they offer should consider their cultural background, needs and ways of learning. There are certain barriers in access to educational services, including higher education. These barriers are compounded by other factors which impede educational participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including significantly higher incidence of health and learning problems, limitations in curriculum regarding cultural context, teaching styles and forms of organisational assessment, different language backgrounds, limited knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures by teachers. Overall, all education and training providers should provide courses and training to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students do not face prejudice and racism from other students and staff. As a result, it is critical that we have early intervention in all health or welfare issues and develop counter-racism procedures so that we address any

educational problems at a very early stage. In all of these processes it is necessary that the heritage and identity of Indigenous students is continuously affirmed. Programs that provide training and development for teachers, at both pre-service and in-service levels, are essential.

In conclusion, the important thing for us to understand as educators, is that regardless of the level we are teaching, teaching doesn't actually lead to learning. As a teacher we must provide the proper environment for learning to take place. Maturity sometimes leads to learning because it leads to a better understanding, but I think that maturity is a lifelong development. In the end it is our responsibility as educators to provide the role models, and lead the way and provide a suitable working and positive learning environment which then engenders positive outcomes from the students. In the end, it is important to say that knowing and learning are not the same thing.



KOORIE BOOGAJA
ABORIGINAL TRIBES

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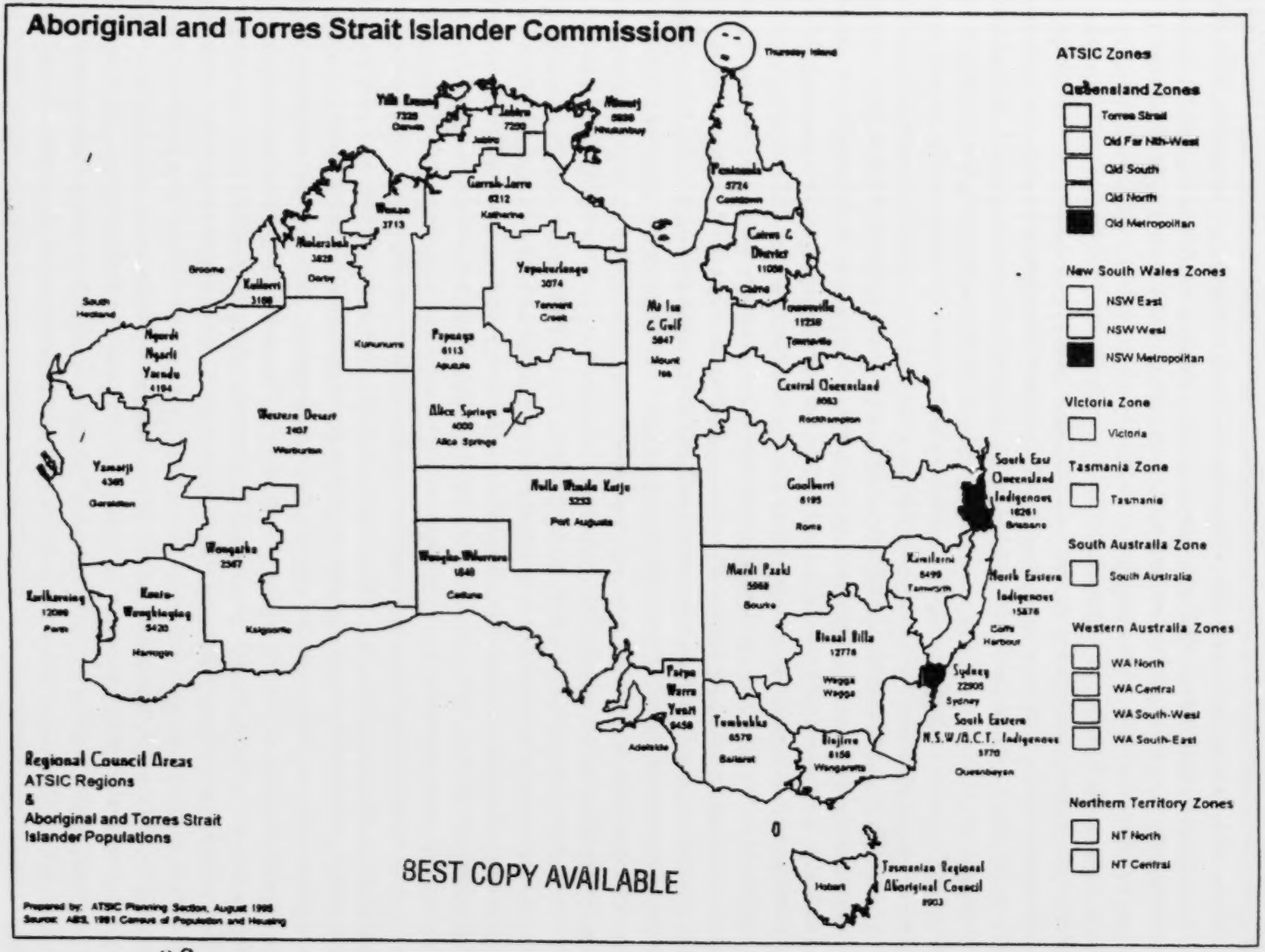
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission



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KEY TO MAP

Aranda (Western) 1
Aranda (Southern) 2
Aranda (Eastern) 3
Iliaura 4
Anmatjera 5
Nalia 6
Ju:Mu 7
Kukatja 8
Amakinnja 9
Wonkanuru 10
Wonkamala 11
Andekerebina 12
Jaroina 13
Wakaja 14
Indji:Linji 15
Wambaia 16
Warramana 17
Kanitj 18
Walpari 19
Waianara 20
Pinuubi 21
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Jadkundjara 23
Kokata 24
Arabana 25
Tirari 26
Dieri 27
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Jeljendi 30
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Brayl:Wun:Yer 383
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Darkinun 406
Awabakal 407
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Weraerai 414
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Jukembal 424
Bigambul 425
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Jagara 438
Dal:A 439
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Tepiti 494
Nathokodi 495
Lo:Tiga 496
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Neamidi 499
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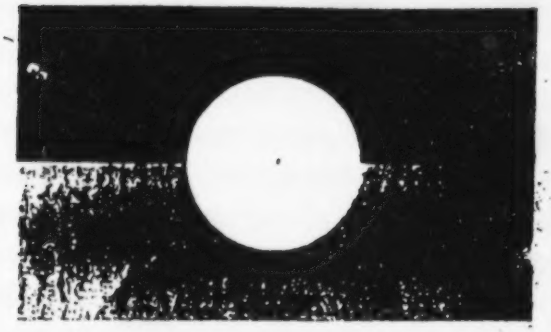
The Aboriginal flag



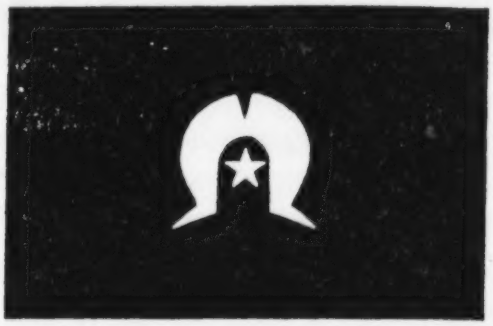
The Aboriginal flag is divided horizontally into equal halves of black (top) and red (bottom), with a yellow circle in the centre.

The black symbolises Aboriginal people and the yellow represents the sun, the constant renewer of life. Red depicts the earth and also represents ochre, which is used by Aboriginal people in ceremonies.

The flag — designed by Harold Thomas — was first flown at Victoria Square, Adelaide, on National Aborigines' Day on 12 July 1971. It was used later at the Tent Embassy in Canberra in 1972.

Today the flag has been adopted by all Aboriginal groups and is flown or displayed permanently at Aboriginal centres throughout Australia.

The Torres Strait Islander flag



The Torres Strait Islander flag — designed by the late Bernard Namok — stands for the unity and identity of all Torres Strait Islanders.

It features three horizontal coloured stripes, with green at the top and bottom and blue in between — divided by thin black lines.

A white dhari (headdress) sits in the centre, with a five-pointed white star underneath it.

The colour green is for the land, and the dhari is a symbol of all Torres Strait Islanders.

The black represents the people and the blue is for the sea.

The five-pointed star represents the island groups. Used in navigation, the star is also an important symbol for the seafaring Torres Strait Islander people.

The colour white of the star represents peace.

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